

A New Prize for the Best-Grown Novel

THE main feature of literature in London at the moment is that no one is talking about books at all. There has been talk about Ascot, about whether Lloyd George is going to the right or to the left, about Mlle. Lenglen, the marvellous French tennis player, and a great deal of talk about "getting away," to Scotland, to Switzerland, to Italy, to Timbuctoo—to anywhere without income tax, Bolsheviks and Robert Smillie—but about books no word!

No one, for instance, seems in the least excited about Ibañez's *The Four Horsemen*, over which you in America have waxed so enthusiastic; the last Jazz poem from the Hogarth Press has raised neither a smile nor a curse; no one is debating as to whether Mr. George or Mr. Cannan is the more iconoclastic; no one is wondering how much longer Compton Mackenzie intends to stay in Capri. *The Undying Fire* has lit no flame in the hearts of the London public. Good books continue to appear, books like Mr. Herbert's admirable first novel, *The Secret Battle*, or Richard Aldington's new poems or Robert Lynd's essays—there is no general interest in any of them. I prophesy that from now until the middle of September books in London will be as dead as mutton.

It is natural perhaps that this quiet pause should seem the right occasion for the bursting forth of the announcements of a number of literary competitions and prizes. In France this is an old and well established custom, hallowed by age and the French Academy. Here in this modest and unemotional country we fight shy of such displays; only Mr. Gosse, who

A London Letter From Hugh Walpole

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has stood now for many years with one foot in Regent's Park and the other on the Continent, encourages them.

It was he who before the war presided over the delivery of the "Polignac" prize, which distinguished itself principally by crowning Mr. De la Mare's *The Return* and Mr. Hodgson's *Bull* and then suddenly gave up the ghost. Many years ago the "Academy" was famous for its literary prizes, and crowned Conrad's *Almayer* (or was it *The Nigger?*) and Stephen Phillips's *Marpessa* and something, I think, by W. B. Yeats. Now there is the announcement of the Hawthornden Prize to be given to a work of imagination in prose or poetry, and the writer of the same must be under forty years of age. The judges are Lawrence Binyon, T. C. Squire and Mr. "Eddie" Marsh.

At the same time Messrs. Melrose are offering prizes for works of fiction, and Collins, the publishers, who have sprung so quickly to the front lately, have also a novel competition. *Land and Water* has been having a short story competition, and this has been won by Miss Ethel Mayne.

The Hawthornden Prize is a thing by itself and the names of the judges guarantee its high standards. It will be given, I imagine, with the definite

view that it is for the encouragement of work that would be otherwise not very generally known. But does such an award help toward real publicity? Did De la Mare's gaining the Polignac prize sell fifty extra copies of *The Return*? I very much doubt it. I have not the slightest idea as to the recipient this year (the first award is to be made at the end of this week), but it is amusing to speculate on the result. Such books as Freeman's *Memories of Childhood*, Romer Wilson's *Martin Schuler*, Sheila Kaye-Smith's *Little England*, Brett Young's *Marching on Tanga* (does it come within the twelve months?) all rise to the mind. These authors show promise as well as achievement and are none of them as well known as they ought to be. To tell the simple truth there has not been, I think, one single work of outstanding genius published in English during the last twelve months. And why should there be? Works of outstanding genius are rare and rightly so.

The novel competitions are another affair; they are frankly commercial, instituted with the hope of discovering some new "best sellers." There is, in fact, a desperate looking around just now, both on the part of the publisher and the critic, for some new novelist of mark. With the exception

of Stephen McKenna there has been no new arrival of importance since D. H. Lawrence's appearance. Miss Delafield, Miss Dune, Miss Wilson have still to prove that they are "stayers" and authors of more than one book, and there has been positively no man at all. Will these competitions discover somebody? I very much doubt it. The only novelist of real merit who has ever, in my experience, won a novel competition was Miss Rose Macaulay, who once entrapped Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton into giving her the prize. I say "entrapped" because the novel with which she won the award was as little like the customary prize novel as Miss Ethel Dell's stories are like Joseph Conrad's. I remember what must have been, I think, the first of these contests some ten years ago, when Frank Swinnerton and I both sent in stories to Mr. Melrose's first novel competition.

The prize was secured, I remember, by a daughter of Jacob Hood, the artist. After that success she seemed to fade away and has not, I think, written anything for a number of years.

Personally I should like to start a competition for novelists. I would give a prize of two thousand pounds (or \$10,000) to the winner, but the condition would be attached that all the unsuccessful competitors should pledge themselves never to publish a novel again. As it is, these competitions encourage many people to try who would never otherwise have thought of it—once begun they find it the easiest thing in the world!

So it is—fatally easy—to write a bad one. HUGH WALPOLE.

"A History of the Jews in Modern Times"

By MORRIS JASTROW, Jr.

DR. MAX RAISIN'S *A History of the Jews in Modern Times* is not a book for light summer reading. Everything about it is heavy from the weight of the binding and paper to the cumbersome of the style, teeming with unidiomatic expressions and slipshod sentences. There ought to be a fine imposed on a publisher who brings out a book so awkward to handle as this one, which wears one out physically in the attempt to hold it in one's hands for any length of time, or the publisher ought to provide a reading desk with every copy. The only thing about the book which is not heavy is the illustrations, which are frequently so lightly printed as to be almost worthless, and such of these cheap woodcuts which are not lightly printed are smeared, which is even worse.

The book by virtue of its contents deserved a better dress, though the contents also are subject to serious criticism. Whether this is the first attempt of the author or not, he clearly has not acquired the art of book making, as little as his publisher has that of book manufacture. In the first place he has added to his book both a preface and an introduction, which to say the least is unusual. There is nothing in the introduction of three pages which might not have been said in the preface of four pages. Secondly, the arrangement of the material is most awkward. The author covers, as the title indicates, the modern period of the history of the Jews from the close

of the eighteenth century to our own times. He divides his subject by countries, embracing all of Europe except Russia and the Balkan States in one chapter, the American continent in another, and what he calls by the curious name of *Colonial Jewry* in a fifth and closing with *Palestine and Zionism*, which takes up one-fourth of the entire book.

There is a total lack of proportion in this unsystematic division. The tone is entirely too apologetic and at times peevish. The broad vision is lacking, and one receives the erroneous impression that the history of the Jews is one of struggle instead of achievement. Instead of giving us a continuous narrative the author is constantly obliged to retrace his steps, with the inevitable result that he fails to give his readers a well defined picture of the evolution of modern Jewish history. Even when he marshals his facts in a tolerably satisfactory manner, he does not interpret them. He fails to distinguish between important and unimportant events. He seems to be more interested in telling us about personages than about things. Indeed, for the larger part, his volume is a series of rather disconnected notices about men who became prominent, enclosed in a network of loose narrative.

Instead of dividing his work into chapters by countries, he should have singled out important topics such as the movement for the civic emancipation of the Jews in the various countries of Europe, the movement for religious reform within Judaism, emigration movements among Jews, educational efforts, communal organization and activities and the like; and he should have traced the course of events within such subdivisions in the various countries in which Jews have settled. Then he might have closed his book by a series of chapters on the participation of Jews in the general political, commercial and scientific life. That would have been a real history, and one that would have been of value as well as of interest, for the history of the Jews since the days of the French revolution, from which event our author dates his "modern times," is indeed replete with interest and presents many features of a unique character, especially in the achievements and remarkable position acquired by the Jews in Western Europe and in this country.

Having said so much in criticism, and to which one might add bad proofreading,

especially in the misspelling of names (even when attached to portraits), as, for example, in the case of Lassalle (with the omission of the e, which is unpardonable), Hirz for Herz, Emanuel Kant for Immanuel Kant, Joselowicz in the text as against Joscelowicz in the index, omission of the surname Herman in the name of the late Chief Rabbi of England, Edward Everett Hale indexed as mentioned on page 709, whereas the book ends with page 437, and much more of the like. Having said all this, it is only proper to commend the industry of the author in collecting his material, which must have involved much labor. Dr. Raisin is not a historian, but he knows at least how to collect the tools for the historian, who may some day arise to give us a real history of the Jews in modern times, from the period at which the late Heinrich Graetz, who was a historian, broke off his monumental history, and of which an abridgment in five volumes with an excellent index volume was published some fifteen years ago by the American Jewish Publication Society. The vast material brought together by Dr. Raisin is sufficient to show how interesting and instructive that history will be when it comes to be written.

Scattered as the Jews are over the entire globe, there is scarcely a country

which is not represented in the author's work, but what he gives us is all in such hopeless confusion that we do not envy the task of the one who will make the attempt to pick out the significant data from the mass of unimportant details, descending at times to mere biographical gossip. As a final illustration of how little of real history is to be found in this volume, we may instance the almost entire omission of statistics of Jewish population and immigration; and as a final illustration of the lack of proportion in the presentation of the material, the curious circumstance that one-fourth of the work is devoted to "Zionism," which seems to be the author's particular hobby, by the side of Yiddish and neo-Hebraic literature. The brief bibliography of less than two pages attached to the book is a poor piece of work, in contrast to the index, which is fairly satisfactory.

A HISTORY OF THE JEWS IN MODERN TIMES. By MAX RAISIN. New York: Hebrew Publishing Company.

TO date Doubleday, Page & Co. have sold 1,324,943 copies of Tarkenton books. Of *Penrod*, 234,531 copies have been sold. The advance sale of *Ramsay Millholland* has been much larger than that of *Penrod*.

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